

**Text: Ac 22.17-22**

This afternoon we come back to our same text, but I want to take it in a different direction.

As we go through life, we find ourselves faced with moments of great decision. A choice lies before us. We find ourselves pulled in two (or more) directions at once. How are we to decide?

We might consult godly friends for advice — but if you ask too many, you will often find multiple opinions (especially if they are Baptists).

We might search the Scriptures, but the decision may not hinge on any particular Biblical principle.

Our passage today has one little bit in it (in comparison with Acts 9) that gives us a bit of a hint about how to make such decisions.

To start with, then, I want to read both Acts 9 and Acts 22.

Read Ac 9.26-30

Read Ac 22.17-21

In comparing these passages, do you see the key difference?

In Acts 9, it appears that Paul acts on the advice of the disciples alone.

In Acts 22, it appears that Paul acts on the advice of the vision alone.

*These facts are not in conflict. Both the disciples and the Lord acted in concert.*

We don't know which was first, whether God gave Paul the vision first or whether the disciples came to Paul first and the Lord confirmed it with a vision.

It doesn't matter.

The key is that what we see in this event is:

*The Works of God and Man*

So, when we are making decisions, since God doesn't give us a direct vision as he gave Paul, how can we proceed in faith in those circumstances?

**Proposition:** In living for God, we search out all we can know for our life choices, and we trust God when we make them.

# I. The circumstances leading to Paul's decision

## A. The circumstances from the "third party" perspective (Acts 9)

1. Paul, recent convert, returns to Jerusalem where he formerly "made havock" (Ac 8.3, KJV) of the church (9.26)
2. He joins the church, gaining their confidence, boldly proclaiming Jesus – noted in three verses
  - a. "at Damascus he had spoken out boldly in the name of Jesus" (9.27)
  - b. "in Jerusalem, speaking out boldly in the name of the Lord" (9.28)
  - c. "he was talking and arguing with the Hellenistic *Jews*" (9.29)
3. The Jews plotted to kill him (9.29)
4. The disciples "got him out of Dodge" (9.30)

## B. The circumstances from the "first person" testimony (Acts 22)

1. Paul was praying in the temple (22.17)
2. The Lord, in a vision, warns Paul away from Jerusalem, for the Jews will not listen to his testimony (22.18)
3. Paul protests about his unique qualifications to speak (22.19-20)
4. The Lord commands him to Go! — the Lord has other plans for him (22.21)

We should note that the Lord didn't send Peter or the other apostles away from Jerusalem, though we find in Ac 12 the Jews succeeded in getting James executed and Peter imprisoned.

God isn't bound by the plots of evil men.

## II. The definition of providence

### A. Theologians

1. A. A. Hodge: "Providence, from *pro* and *video*, literally means foresight, and then a careful arrangement prepared beforehand for the accomplishment of predetermined ends."<sup>1</sup>
2. Charles Hodge: "God's works of providence are his most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures and all their actions."<sup>2</sup>
3. A. A. Hodge again: "God ... continually controls and directs the actions of all his creatures ... so that while he never violates the law of their several natures, he yet infallibly causes all actions and events singular and universal to occur according to the eternal and immutable plan embraced in his decree."<sup>3</sup>

Both the Hodges are Calvinists, so I have disagreements, but these definitions are sufficient for our purposes.

### B. Illustrated in our passages

1. In Acts 9, the brethren (including Paul) are active in the decision making
  - a. There must be something of a story behind this
  - b. The distance from Jerusalem to Caesarea (on modern roads) is about 75 miles
  - c. What was involved in getting Paul to Caesarea (Paul will take the same trip in ch. 23 under Roman guard)?
2. In Acts 22, the Lord is prominent in the decision to get out of Jerusalem
  - a. Man acts and God acts
  - b. The two are in concert

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<sup>1</sup> Archibald Alexander Hodge, *Outlines of Theology: Rewritten and Enlarged* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1878), 258.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 575.

<sup>3</sup> Hodge, *Outlines of Theology: Rewritten and Enlarged*, 262.

### III. The need to trust providence

#### A. When we face decisions, many factors come to play

1. What impact will this have on my family?
2. What impact will it have on others (my church, my relationships, my current ministry, etc.)?
3. What will opportunities will come my way
  - a. If I remain in status quo
  - b. If I change from status quo

This could be a decision to keep one job or take another, a decision to move somewhere or stay, a decision to pursue a relationship or turn away from it.

There are endless possibilities

#### B. We often will hear someone say, “Well, I prayed about it.”

1. Sometimes that statement has the effect of shutting up every question that might arise
2. Nevertheless, prayer should be part of your decision making process — through prayer, you can unite with God in what God is doing

“It appears from Scripture that in many cases God works in a sort of partnership with humans. God does not act if humans do not play their part.”<sup>4</sup>

- a. Jesus could not perform many miracles in Nazareth because the Nazarenes didn’t believe in him (Mk 6.6)
- b. The centurion asking healing for his servant was rewarded in his petition for his faith (Mt 8.5-13)
- c. The woman with the issue of blood likewise found God’s response because of her faith (Mt 9.18-22)

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<sup>4</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1998), 430.

### 3. God's interest in his creation

- a. God controls nature so that ultimately his will takes place (Ps 135.5-7 and others)
- b. God involves himself in the outworking of the "animal kingdom" (Ps 104.21-29)
- c. God orders human history and the destiny of nations (Dan 2.21)

Dan 2.21 "It is He who changes the times and the epochs; He removes kings and establishes kings; He gives wisdom to wise men And knowledge to men of understanding.

- d. God intervenes in individual lives (Hannah, 1 Sam 2.6-7)

1 Sa 2.6-7 "The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to Sheol and raises up.<sup>7</sup> "The LORD makes poor and rich; He brings low, He also exalts.

- e. David (and many other faithful saints) put his trust in God's work (Ps 31.14-15)

Ps 31.14-15 But as for me, I trust in You, O LORD, I say, "You are my God."<sup>15</sup> My times are in Your hand; Deliver me from the hand of my enemies and from those who persecute me.

### C. Back to Paul and his trust in God

1. Paul and the brethren acted
2. God also acted, leading Paul through the first, second, and third missionary journeys to that moment on the steps of the Castle of Antonia
3. This is how we live in concert with the Lord, we act and we trust

### Conclusion:

**Proposition:** In living for God, we search out all we can know for our life choices, and we trust God when we make them.